THE BUILDER,
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SATURDAY, APRIL 29, 1843.

We have at considerable pains procured for and laid before our readers the draught of the proposed bill for the Amendment of the Metropolitan Building Act. The importance of such a measure at this time can hardly be overrated, and, although we are not inclined to take much exception at it, we think it should be narrowly scrutinized by those whose interests are to be closely affected by it.

Although to many of our country readers the subject may not be of large interest, yet we shall be readily forgiven by them, inasmuch as it will be recognized as our duty to seize hold of every occasion of this sort, even when a smaller number of individuals are concerned, and to enable that number effectually to meet the exigency which a circumstance of this sort is calculated to involve them in. But this Building Act will, in our opinion, have a more influential bearing upon the provinces than any of its predecessors. It is drawn up with more attention to the present state of general building science, and is no doubt regarded by its framers as a prelude to the introduction of a general measure, at least for the majority of the large towns of the empire. The question of width of streets, rates of building, and the consequent scale of construction, as to foundations, walls, &c.; the question of sufficient drainage, of the ventilation of dwelling apartments, and the general question of supervision and survey, will all no doubt be pressed upon the consideration of the authorities in provincial districts—and it is high time they should be. It will therefore be not regarded as so much waste paper that we have given a reprint of this important bill. It is to be brought into the House of Commons by Lord Lincoln and Sir James Graham; and as there will probably be no time lost in forwarding the measure, it behoves the building world, owners of property included, to discuss its provisions in time, and endeavour to engraft upon it such amendments or additions as they think desirable and practicable. There is not the least doubt of such suggestions—put in the right way and in the right spirit—being attended to, and it will not be presumed, we are sure, by any of the movers in this measure, that it is so perfect as not to require the exercise of other minds who may judge of it under different aspects.

If we have any particular remark to offer at present it is, that we do not see a sufficient provision for meeting those exceptional cases that will undoubtedly occur in this age of improved structure. It is inseparable from matters of legislation upon such subjects that they should be based upon the assumption of a permanent principle; that, for instance, all rules and ordinances should proceed upon the present building practice, without regard to what may become the practice next year, or next ten years; but we think it pretty clear that in one or two respects considerable change will take place, or be attempted; and if such should be the case, then we say we do not see in this bill a sufficient discretionary power to admit of the improvements which that change may be the means of favouring us with. Take, for instance, the question of warming and ventilating our dwelling-houses. It is provided in this bill that all apartments for habitation shall have a fire-place and a window to open. As far as the latter point goes, it may be always very well and very desirable, but we question whether it will be so as regards a fire-place. The object being to secure a ventilating current, in which the chimney and fire-place so materially contribute, we apprehend that the rule is made stringent with that view; but we submit that many other modes of flueing the walls, and of carrying off foul air, as well as of supplying fresh air, will be introduced, and that, in fact, the philosophy of ventilation has been but clumsily regarded in this provision. Take again the regulation as to walls. Why, we may have iron frame-work introduced with concrete filling, and probably encaustic tile or brick facings,—the application, in fact, but with different materials, of the old principle of post and pane work, or timber framing and filling in. We have had before us for a long time a suggestion and complete plans for this sort of structure. Altogether, however, we think this bill an excellent measure; it is more worthy the name of a Building Act than any preceding measure; and, indeed, we despair of seeing any thing better until a legislative council of architects, surveyors, and builders, on some after day, are empowered by the charter of their incorporation to submit such a measure, matured and complete, for the affirming fiat of the supreme legislature.

One thing, however, as regards the owners of house property, for we must not look at every thing with a builder's eye merely—that is, with a narrow and selfish purpose. Let us hope that this class of our friends, of those upon whom the building class are so largely dependent, whose interests and ours, in fact, so largely reciprocate, let us hope that no vexatious or oppressive enactments, or any thing likely to work in this spirit, will find its place in this bill. It is highly necessary that extensive improvements should be made, both in public and private drainage, but it is equally necessary that, in carrying out those improvements, we should not tax the house owner in any wanton or inconsiderate manner. Great depression has of late been experienced in house property, and it would be a cruel aggravation of the evil, if the greatest possible care were not to be exercised in carrying out the provisions of this Bill, which have a retrospective tendency.

With regard to the appointment of the official referees—the three architects to whom disputed matters are to be referred—we could wish that the right of nomination had been vested in the Profession, and the confirmation only with the Secretary of State; the appointment is one of high import, and its honourable character would, in our opinion, be materially enhanced by making the distinction one to be conferred upon the leading members of the Profession by the discrimination and the suffrages of their united brethren.

We wish that as well as enforcing the salutary regulation in respect of private water-closets, that the suggestions of our correspondent, Mr. Booth, for public ones, and for urinals, could be included in this Bill. We think it ought not to be overlooked.

There is a good deal of very useful matter, which the general builder and workman will find an advantage in perusing—the table of scantlings we think a very good one in most respects, and altogether we do not regret, nor do we think our readers will, to have occupied so much space with it. We believe the document will have merit as a work of reference at all times.

We are especially thankful to the gentleman to whom we are indebted for much assistance in procuring a copy of the Bill, and for the other information with which he has favoured us. We learn that a special meeting of the Committee of the Master Carpenters' Society is summoned for Tuesday next, at the Freemasons' Tavern, to take the matter into consideration. Already the signs of activity in canvassing for new appointments are beginning to be exhibited. We observe from the papers that Mr. H. E. Kendall has put forth his pretensions for the district of Hampstead.

BUILDERS' DRAWING SCHOOL.

We have elsewhere inserted a letter on this subject, and have had four other names subscribed in consequence of what we said last week under this head. We have no doubt of having the twenty names directly, and we consider this a very important beginning; to what it may give rise it is not for us to conjecture or concern ourselves about—all in its own matured time. For the present we have to make provision for so far as we see, and although we are prepared with a gentleman at our elbow to enter upon the duties that would devolve upon him, and for which he is highly qualified, yet, as we have no purposes of our own, or any other private purpose to promote, and as we are greatly anxious to put the right hand to the work and in the right place, we now invite any other gentleman to favour us with his credentials, and to enable us to judge of his qualifications, assuring him that the post he is invited to aspire to fill will be none of the lowest in the scale of honour and responsibility. A word as to the plan we would pursue. This school should not be a mere drawing school; there must be a collection and classification of models, books, &c.; and much of the modelling or model-making done by the students, so that they may put in practice at a bench, under proper instruction, what they acquire by theory and by lines. It must not only be a carpenters' school, but a general builders'—so that the mason, bricklayer, plasterer, painter, &c. may be well instructed in that which bears upon their respective arts, and acquire a practical skill in drawing and composition. With the support we shall have, we have no fear of doing much good service; but it will be manifest that architects and master-builders may most materially assist this work by contributions of models, &c.; and we shall be most happy to receive such and acknowledge them through THE BUILDER. Let it be understood, too, that we merely take the initiative in the business, we shall be glad to resign to abler hands the conduct of the work when it is so far matured as to meet their approbation.

WEST INDIES.—Trinidad, March 1.—A splendid cathedral of the second order of Gothic, has been lately erected. It is 240 feet in length, 120 feet in width in the transepts, 80 feet wide in the nave, and 80 feet in height to the ridge of the roof. It has cost about 50,000*l.* sterling, 16,000*l.* of which were munificently contributed by the government, besides granting the permission to take from the government quarry all the stones necessary for the walls; and to cut on crown lands all the cedar and other timber required for the roof and the interior decorations of the sacred edifice. A suitable college and a large and commodious convent have been established. Since 1828, nineteen new churches, twenty-two new chapels, and several new schoolhouses have been built; there are, at present, six new churches and chapels building.

BLACK MARBLE CHIMNEY-PIECES.—The bituminous carbonate, or black marble of Derbyshire, takes a very high polish, and is wrought into chimney-pieces and a great variety of useful and ornamental articles, which are often embellished by figures, the manner of producing which is as follows:—The subject is sketched upon the marble, and those parts intended to retain the polish are covered with a varnish which will resist acid; when the varnish is dry, the article is immersed in a solution of sulphuric acid and water. This decomposes those parts of the marble uncovered, and when sufficiently corroded, it is washed in clean water, and the varnish removed with spirits of turpentine; the corroded parts will be of a lighter colour, and without polish, producing a pleasing contrast.

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